



From *The tempest* To *Hag-Seed*: The rise of Caliban in Postcolonial Criticism

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Abstract— Canadian writers have produced a variety of genres. Influences on Canadian writings are broad, both geographically and historically. Criticism of Canadian literature has focused on its nationalistic and regional themes, although this is only a small portion of Canadian literary criticism. Margaret Eleanor Atwood, born in November 18, 1939 is a Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, and environmental activist. She is a winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award and Prince of Asturias Award for Literature, has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize five times, winning once, and has been a finalist for the Governor General's Award several times, winning twice. In 2001, she was inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame. Margaret Atwood's rendered her excellent play *Hag-Seed* in 2016 to Hogarth Shakespeare publications. It is a novel that takes Shakespeare's play of enchantment, retribution, and second chances leads us on an interactive, illusion ridden journey with new surprises and wonders of its own. No study of *The Tempest* would be complete without some knowledge of its life on the stage in a historical perspective since, among other reasons, the stage history runs almost parallel with the critical history of the play and is therefore instructive in many ways. Moreover, criticism and stage presentation are complementary to each other. In the absence of directly inherited traditions from Shakespeare's day, the theatre has often learnt from criticism and, conversely, no critical insight would be of much value unless it could be realized in the theatre. The earliest recorded performance of the play was at the court: "a play called *The Tempest*" was presented there in November 1611. Again, it was a part of the festivities organized in honour of the betrothal and marriage of Princess Elizabeth, daughter of James I, during the winter of 1612-1613.



Keywords— Canadian Literature, Margaret Atwood, *Hag-Seed*, *The Tempest*, Shakespearean Criticism

Postcolonial Aspects of *The Tempest*

The play *The Tempest* might have been publicly performed at the Blackfriars and even at the Globe soon after the court presentation but there are no records. Theatrical traditions were totally lost with the closure of the theatres in 1642. The text of Shakespeare's play was grossly mutilated when, soon after the restoration, D'Avenant, with some help from Dryden, altered it in order to make it "fit" for the changed conditions of the new age. The adaptation, "The Tempest, or the Enchanted Island" by Dryden and D'Avenant was presented at the Duke's Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields on 7 November 1667 and published in 1670. The well-known diarist, Pepys saw it eight times and greatly liked it. In this adaptation the principle of formal balance

was carried to extremes by adding a number of characters to serve as counterparts to the existing ones. Hippolito (a man who had never seen a woman), Dorinda (a sister-companion for Miranda), Sycorax (a sister for Caliban) and Milcha (a female sprite, Ariel's companion) were some of the new additions. Caliban is a creature who is different in nature, language and appearance from every being that ever existed, whether in literature or in the world. It is in the early passages of the play in which this rare and fanciful monstrosity is really sketched out. During his first short interview between Prospero and Caliban all the main points of the monster's nature are brought out.

The Rise of Caliban

Caliban has inspired varying criticism and interpretation. To some he is the epitome of evil whose disposition is so hopeless that he cannot be rescued from the pits of his darkened existence. There are others who believe that he is the symbol of a “mindless mob”. Trinculo thinks he is a fish, and Prospero calls him a tortoise. He neither recognizes nor understands any moral law, and is often considered as the unconscious image in our minds of the evolutionary “missing link”. Thus, he is symbolic of mankind in its initial stage of existence. He is so many things to so many people, and he inspires so many varied interpretations that it is impossible to merely call him a ‘brutish savage’. He is a product entirely of nature. We are bound to go wrong of we assess him with our social values. What we need to do is to assess him in intellectuality moral terms by an inviolate moral code. It is then that the true Caliban surfaces. Canibal means “human that eats human flesh”. Shakespeare’s *Caliban* is from a version of the word, with -n- and -l- interchanged, found in Hakluyt’s ‘Voyages’. *The Tempest* was inspired by the decolonization movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. These readings challenge more traditional interpretations of the play, questioning Prospero’s ownership of the island and rethinking the role of Caliban.

What was Shakespeare’s response to stereotypes of race and religion? Postcolonial criticism is a method of analysis that addresses questions of racial identity and equality, and also of gender equity via two main modes of inquiry. First, it investigates how Shakespeare’s plays relate to the social codes and conventions by which early modern Europeans defined non-European and non-Christian people and races they encountered. Second, it explores the more recent history of the *reception* of Shakespearian drama within non-Western societies and settings – in Africa, India, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

Thus, postcolonial criticism of a play like *Othello* not only draws our attention to Renaissance attitudes toward Moors, Africans, and Turks, among others, but it also examines how the play may have been interpreted and performed in countries involved in recent colonial and post-colonial struggles, for example in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. This process was, of course, a complex one. On the one hand, Shakespeare was an export to the colonies of European literature and language as a part of their policy of cultural domination. On the other hand, it also enabled the colonized groups to revise and remake Shakespeare’s works in ways which related to their own social conditions.

Early post-colonial responses to *The Tempest*

Until the advent of postcolonial criticism, Anglo-American critics frequently read *The Tempest* as an allegory about artistic creation. Since this was once considered to be Shakespeare’s final play, Prospero has been defined as a surrogate playwright, shaping the main action through his magic. Starting with the artificial tempest of the opening scene, Prospero directs, rewards, and punishes the main characters according to his master plan, which is to marry his daughter, Miranda, to Ferdinand, the son and heir to the Duke of Naples, his former enemy. This plan is considered his revenge for his forcible exile from his own kingdom. In leading to this desired union of Naples and Milan, Prospero obstructs the advances of Caliban, the native of the island where he and Miranda are exiled.

Furthermore, Prospero’s magical power not only ensures the enslavement of Caliban, but also demands the servitude of a sprite named Ariel to put his magical designs into action. Overall, in this commonly accepted reading of *The Tempest*, Prospero emerges as an all-knowing, benevolent patriarch and artistic creator whose motives are beyond reproach. Since the play is a romance in terms of its genre, its plot was generally approached as a fanciful tale with little connection to the history of the period or its aftermath.

Empire Writes Back tells that this is a long tradition of privileging Prospero’s creative powers as beneficent and god-given began to be overshadowed by the growing stature of Caliban, following the de-colonisation movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. If, traditionally, Prospero’s art represented the world of civility and learning in contrast to the ‘natural’ black magic of Caliban’s mother Sycorax, anti-colonial revisions of the play challenged this rather abstract Eurocentric division between art and nature. Instead, as Africans and Caribbeans saw that widespread national liberation was imminent – that is from 1959 onwards – they began to revise and mobilise the play in defence of Caliban’s right to the island on which he is born prior to Prospero’s arrival. Caliban’s assertion in the play, ‘This island’s mine,’ by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak’st from me’ (1.2.331–32), became the rallying cry for African and Caribbean intellectuals from the 1960s to the 1970s.

For instance, Aimé Césaire, a black writer and activist from Martinique, re-wrote Shakespeare’s play in 1969 in French. *Une Tempête* (translated into the English *A Tempest* in 1985) celebrates Caliban’s verbal attacks on Prospero and questions the latter’s claims to the island. Set in a colony – a prototype of a Caribbean or African setting – in the throes of resistance and unrest, Césaire’s play focuses initially on Caliban’s resistance to Prospero’s control over language. Here, Césaire is clearly sensitive to

the way in which the name Caliban/Cannibal appears in Shakespeare's play and in colonial history as a cultural stereotype for the natives of the New World. Accompanying Caliban's challenge to language are references to an actual guerrilla movement and an impending black independence. And Ariel, who is labelled a 'mulatto' in this play, represents the mixed races more able to accept their limited oppression. Overall, this play characterizes the changes undergone by the figure of Caliban in productions of the play: in 18th and 19th century European productions he was represented as a primitive or 'missing link' from Darwin's theory (i.e. a being in between apes and humans in the evolutionary process). However, with the advent of national liberation of the non-European races, as in Césaire's play, Caliban was widely depicted as a defiant subject under European rule, or simply an embodiment of any oppressed group.

Such identifications with Caliban and an accompanying unease about his alien language typify numerous Latin American and Caribbean responses to the play in the wake of decolonisation in the 1960s. In Africa too, the play became a site for anti-colonial responses, such as the novel *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), by Kenyan Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. This work, however, does not focus on Caliban's potential resistance. Rather, it examines the nature of Prospero's colonising drives and methods. The central character of Ngugi's novel is a colonial functionary, John Thompson, who associates *The Tempest* with the grand moral idea of the British Empire and plans to write about his experiences in Africa in a book entitled *Prospero in Africa*. Overall, whether one considers *The Tempest* as an allegory of Caliban's liberation or of Prospero's colonial paternalism, post-colonial readings of the play's reception in the developing world clearly establish that we can no longer recuperate *The Tempest* as a historically 'innocent' text, uncorrupted by later historical readings.

Caliban's version of history

In trying to view the conditions of Caliban's servitude from *his* perspective, postcolonial criticism gives legitimacy to his claims to the island, based on a reading of history that challenges the version narrated by Prospero to his daughter. In Caliban's account, Prospero is the intruder who betrayed the initial welcome given to him by Caliban:

This island 's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me
Water with berries in 't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee,

And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile –
Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you;
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king, and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o' th' island.

(1.2.331–43)

It is this rendition of history that became the battle cry for the anti-colonial movements in Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America – a rendition that became the staple of many revisions and appropriations of Shakespeare's play in these regions. While the play was written in 17th-century England, postcolonial criticism takes the play outwards towards its complicated transactions between European and African and Caribbean cultures in the succeeding centuries. Postcolonial criticism in the West has mined this new archive of the reception history of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, questioning, once again, all normative ideas of a 'common humanity', while articulating, as Shakespeare did, the voices of the marginal characters in Prospero's grand designs.

CONCLUSION

This paper explores various interpretations of *The Tempest* concentrating on the postcolonial aspects. Contrarian viewpoints of the text are investigated. Shakespeare creates a world of imagination and illusion: a completion between the "real world" and the "new world". Through this play an important idea can be seen and understood: Utopianism. Utopianism is seen in this play in many different levels. It can be looked at in a social and political level or in a religious level. Shakespeare uses the ideas of Thomas More and Plato in the underlying plots of *The Tempest*. Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* argues that colonialism was not - and had never been – a benevolent movement whose goal was to improve the lives of the colonized; instead, colonists' motives were entirely self - centered – i.e., economic exploitation. According to Césaire, colonizers establish their colonies on Third world countries and they exploit them. This is same in the case of *The Tempest* where Prospero establish his power on the island and exploit the life of Caliban by imposing European civilization on him. When criticism evolves, the minds of the readers have radical change, which makes the minor characters as Heroes. This paper presents the evolution of Caliban from a character of hatred and subservience to that of a disempowered individual.

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